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A Psychoanalysis of Milk: The Case of Alfred Hitchcock

In memory of Roland-François Lack

There is a scene in Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941) where Johnnie (Cary Grant), a notorious charmer but also, it transpires, a compulsive gambler, takes a glass of milk at bedtime to his recently married wife Lina (Joan Fontaine). Lina is suffering from some sort of nervous collapse because, repeatedly stumbling across her husband's sinister-seeming deceptions, she is becoming increasingly paranoid. In particular, she suspects that Johnnie is poisoning her so that, once she is dead, he can use her life insurance to pay off his gambling debts. So does *Suspicion's* viewer.

Like Lina's, the viewer's suspicions are centred on the glass of milk. And it is this glass of milk, putatively poisoned, that is the focal point of my attempt in this article, pursuing hints to be found in the writings both of Gaston Bachelard and Jean-Paul Sartre, to outline a psychoanalysis of this peculiarly blank substance. Milk is a liquid that, in a symbolic sense, is superficially secure in its identification with innocence and purity ('pure as milk' is a phrase that, for instance, Sartre uses, to calculated ironic effect of course, in his account of the politics of innocence in Jean Genet's childhood).¹ And, in part, I hope to displace this apparently instinctive or spontaneous association with innocence and purity, one that can lead us to misapprehend its phenomenological complexity. But, more importantly, I also propose to distil and extract a sense of milk's ontology. The psychoanalysis of milk that I outline here, using Hitchcock as a case study, is thus not principally concerned with interpreting this object as a symbolic one that, like blood, water or wine, is inevitably traversed by individual and collective fantasies of various kinds – above all in so far as these relate to maternity, to the nourishing and the nurturing. Instead, it is concerned with excavating what might be identified as milk's concealed or occluded ontological meaning.

What in its innermost being is milk? What is the alchemical significance, so to speak, of this chemical composite consisting of fat and protein particles dispersed in a fluid containing, among other things, water, sugar and minerals? What is the secret of this secretion? On several occasions, a couple of which I will canvas in more detail in a later section, Sartre alludes to a shocking phrase he takes from a poem by Jacques Audiberti: 'the secret blackness of milk' (*la secrète noirceur du lait*). It is this 'secret blackness', materialized in the poison that the viewer assumes is present in the glass taken by Johnnie to Lina in Hitchcock's *Suspicion*, that provides in concentrated form a sense of the ontological truth of milk. One of the occasions on which Sartre mentions 'the secret blackness of milk', the fourth and final one I have been able to locate, is a piece he wrote for the catalogue accompanying an exhibition by the North American sculptor David Hare in 1947. 'Hare told me one day,' Sartre reports in the final paragraph, 'that he wanted to render by properly sculptural means natures analogous to the one Audiberti reveals in his famous phrase, "the secret blackness of milk".' Sartre goes on to argue that, like Hare's works, which are influenced by surrealism but far from reducible to it, Audiberti's image 'oscillate[s] perpetually' between destruction and creation. 'For after all,' he observes, 'it's true that the secret blackness of milk *exists*, and it is also true that the *word* "blackness" gratuitously destroys the *essence* of milk.'²

The purpose of this article is to explore, through the films of Hitchcock, in particular *Suspicion*, and in the writings of Bachelard and Sartre, the latter's hypothetical claim that, in some ontological sense, the 'secret blackness of milk' exists and to demonstrate that the idea of 'blackness', its perceived presence, destroys the essence of milk as this is conventionally understood.³ Hitchcock, it could be said, wanted to render by properly cinematic means natures analogous to the one Audiberti reveals in his remarkable, once-famous phrase, 'the secret blackness of milk.'

In the well-known scene from *Suspicion* that I am reconstructing, set in the fashionable and ultimately unaffordable house Johnnie has rented for them in an idyllic village near the English coast, Hitchcock carefully darkens the romantic and comic moods that have been characteristic of the film so far. It begins as Johnnie, who has presumably dismissed the servants, quits the kitchen and, switching off the electric lights on the ground floor, crosses the villa's cavernous entrance hall in the dark. He has delicately balanced the glass of milk on a circular silver tray that is itself balanced in his left hand. What is going on beneath the surface? Is the glass of milk pure or is it

poisoned? Is Johnnie a rakish, rough-edged hero or, like Bruno in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), a sociopathic villain?⁴ Is this the sort of romantic comedy typical of Cary Grant's performances in the early 1940s, or is it in fact an experiment in English noir?⁵ Does the film, in short, have a 'secret blackness'?

In a smooth, continuous motion, one so precise it seems eerily mechanical, Johnnie proceeds to ascend the grand, gracefully curving central staircase to Lina's bedroom (Figure 1). His face is a blank mask. As he silently glides upstairs past a series of sentimental pictures that appear to portray flirtatious couples, he is a dense black mass silhouetted against the pale wall and the prominent dado-rail beneath it. The surface of this wall is dramatically latticed with shadows from the bannisters, as if the entire house is caught in a net. Or in a spider's web. One of the publicity stills for the film included the following caption: 'Cunning, suggested by spiderlike shadows, seems to climb the stairs hand in hand with Cary Grant as he carries a glass of (poisoned?) milk to Miss Fontaine.'⁶ Johnnie's own shadow, the spider weaving its way through the web, appears then disappears against this background. It resembles the shadow of a shadow. This shadow, as it mounts the stairs ahead of Johnnie's neat, self-contained silhouette, looks stunted and deformed. It is a rough beast that slouches through the house alongside the polished figure in an elegant suit: Mr. Hyde to Johnnie's Dr. Jekyll.

The visual focus of this coolly choreographed shot of Johnnie ascending the staircase is the glass of milk. Milk, in bottles or glasses, is a substance that features to powerful visual and symbolic effect in a striking number of Hitchcock's films – particularly, it is perhaps no accident, his black-and-white ones. According to my rough count, it makes an appearance, aside from *Suspicion*, in *The Lodger* (1927), *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), *Spellbound* (1945), *Notorious* (1946), *Rear Window* (1954), *To Catch a Thief* (1955), *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), *The Wrong Man* (1956), and *Psycho* (1960). As this list already perhaps implies, milk recurs in Hitchcock's oeuvre with the compulsive insistence of a neurotic symptom. And it is for this reason that Slavoj Žižek, using Lacanian language, identifies it as an example of the *sinthom*; that is, a signifier that, though its meaning remains mobile and ambiguous, necessarily changing in relation to the various movies' particular narrative contexts, nonetheless fixes or materializes 'a certain core of enjoyment', one that remains resistant to symbolic interpretation. According to him, the 'glass full of white drink' is one of those 'characteristic details', like a painter's signature mannerism, 'which persist and repeat themselves without implying a common meaning.'⁷



Figure 1 *Suspicion* (1941), dir. Alfred Hitchcock



Figure 2 *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), dir. Stanley Kubrick [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

There is something excessive about the glass of milk in Hitchcock's movies. Elusive even when it performs a self-evident narrative function, it is somehow intrusive in its insistence. Gilles Deleuze also responded to this quality when, in *Cinema 1* (1983), he included the glass of milk in *Suspicion* as an instance of what he called the *démarque* – an



Figure 3 *Spellbound* (1945), dir. Alfred Hitchcock



Figure 4 *Spellbound* (1945), dir. Alfred Hitchcock

ordinary, often domestic object that, like ‘the first gull which strikes the heroine’ in *The Birds* (1963), mysteriously, even violently, detaches itself from or disrupts the ‘customary series’ of signs that make a film seem spontaneously susceptible to interpretation, suddenly becoming extraordinary, even alien.⁸

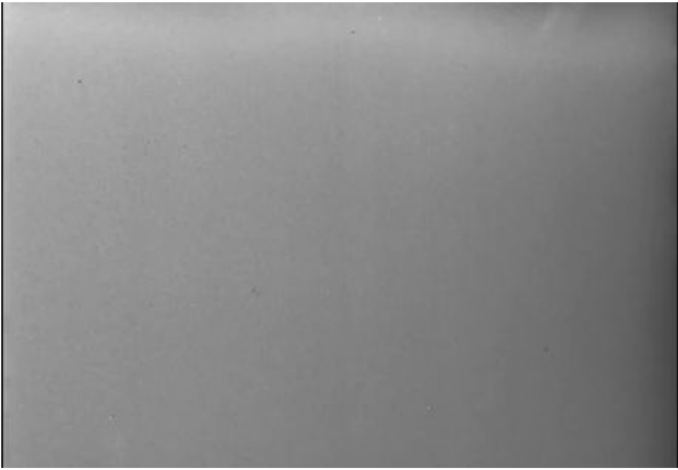


Figure 5 *Spellbound* (1945), dir. Alfred Hitchcock



Figure 6 *Suspicion* (1941), dir. Alfred Hitchcock

The glass of milk, as a Hitchcockian motif – overdetermined in its significance, enigmatic in its associations – plays an especially important role in *Suspicion*. In the scene in which it appears, the camera, positioned by cinematographer Harry Stradling Sr., according to Hitchcock's instructions, on the landing outside Lina's bedroom, first tracks Johnnie across the hallway, then remains motionless as he

ascends the staircase. Franz Waxman's musical score for the film, which offers variations on Strauss' waltz *Wiener Blut*, composed for a royal wedding, loses its lightness and here becomes ominous and darkly ironic. When he reaches the landing, Johnnie walks directly into the lens – to the discomfort of the viewer, who has to repress an impulse to retreat from his looming, threatening form. At this point, the instant before Hitchcock cuts to Lina sitting apprehensively in her bed, the glass of milk seems to float in front of the camera, against the black shape of Johnnie's body, with a ghostly independence, as if it has become detached from him. Throughout the shot, as the object rises up the staircase towards the camera, the glass of milk, which contains a liquid that is oddly unmoving, gleams with an unnatural and upsetting brilliance. In this context, then, the word 'focus' does not fully convey the disturbing and troubling intensity with which the glass of milk attracts the viewer's attention. For it is as if the glass of milk, as indeed the shot hints, is destined to be brought not to Lina, sitting up in bed, but to the viewer standing on the landing – this is the only scene in the film to which Lina is not witness. The viewer, that is, is forced into making an almost excessive investment in the glass of milk. It positively rivets their attention.

Hitchcock, who was understandably proud of the powerful visual and psychological impact of the shot of the glass of milk in this scene, explained its mechanics on a number of occasions. In the course of his interviews with François Truffaut in the early 1960s, for instance, he carefully directed the young French cineaste's attention to it:

A.H. [...] By the way, did you like the scene with the glass of milk?

F.T. When Cary Grant takes it upstairs? Yes, it was very good.

A.H. I put a light in the milk.

F.T. You mean a spotlight on it?

A.H. No, I put a light right inside the glass because I wanted it to be luminous. Cary Grant's walking up the stairs and everyone's attention had to be on that glass.⁹

The light placed inside the glass, as Hitchcock's unprompted comments indicate, makes the milk appear impossibly, preternaturally bright. It seems almost radioactive. But, in producing this effect of luminosity, it is only enhancing or highlighting its intrinsic properties. In his monograph on the representation of milk in the work of various postmodernist artists and photographers, Kenneth Hayes explains that, because of its chemical composition, 'the scattering of light rays within milk gives it an appearance both dense and luminous'. He goes on:

'Milk's unique receptivity to light causes it to shine forth as if internally illuminated, as if brightness itself were made fluid. Milk thus shares in the allure possessed by all glowing things.'¹⁰ The allure or attraction but also the repulsion ...

Johnnie's milk in *Suspicion* is too good to be true. It is too white to be comfortably emblematic of innocence. If, from the early 1940s, the time of his first Hollywood films, 'milk was already a staple of the middle-class home and a signifier of hygienic, healthy living,' as Casey McKittrick points out, then Hitchcock here relishes adulterating or corrupting its benign associations.¹¹

It is as if some foreign matter is secretly present in this supposedly most natural of substances. And this had indeed been the case, historically speaking, for at least a century. From the opening decades of milk's industrial production in the United States, the 1830s and 1840s, unhealthy additives were virtually constituent of this supposedly wholesome substance. The rising demand for milk in cities such as Boston and New York during this period, when it first became a staple foodstuff in American cities as a replacement for breast milk, rapidly led to mass production. As Mark Kurlansky has recorded, 'large stables holding hundreds of cows were established adjacent to breweries, and milk became a big, profitable business.' The run-off from the beer-making process, known as 'swill', was fed to the cows, which were kept in overpopulated and disease-ridden stables, via wooden chutes. But this produced thin, blue-tinted milk that then needed to be supplemented not only with water, which increased the volume of the liquid, but annatto and chalk, which enriched its colour and texture. The resulting product, known as 'swill milk', was identified by the social reformer Robert Milham Hartley as the cause of an unprecedented rise in infant mortality in Manhattan and the centres of other cities.¹² Milk also proved 'dangerous, even deadly', because it was contaminated with bacteria that, prior to the introduction of mandatory pasteurization in the early twentieth century, spread scarlet fever, tuberculosis and other diseases.¹³ Poison was thus already closely identified with milk from the moment it became a mass product marketed for its healthiness.

Hitchcock is, I think, interested in the foreign matter in milk. Milk is, for Hitchcock, always milk and something else. It is always what might be called 'milk plus' ... In *A Clockwork Orange* (Figure 2), both Burgess's book (1962) and Kubrick's film (1971), 'Milk plus' or 'Moloko Plus' is the name of the substance, laced with barbiturates or chemical stimulants, that the protagonist Alex, preparing for a ritual night of 'ultra-violence', drinks with his three droogs in the Korova Milk Bar (milk bars,

sponsored by the Temperance Society, became popular in the United Kingdom in the 1930s, though they were subsequently also a presence in the Soviet Bloc). Here, spoken by Alex (Malcom McDowell) in the form of a voice-over, is the opening speech of Kubrick's screenplay:

There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie and Dim and we sat in the Korova milkbar trying to make up our rassoodocks what to do with the evening. The Korova Milk Bar sold milkplus, milk plus vellocet or synthemesc or drenchrom which is what we were drinking. This would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of the old ultra-violence.¹⁴

In *Nadsat*, the slang Burgess invented for Alex and his gang, the term 'moloko' is derived from the Russian for milk. Milk, in *A Clockwork Orange*, is the means by which, because the Korova bar is not licensed to sell alcohol, the droogs get their drugs. The concoction of milk plus one hallucinogen or another enables them to experience a so-called 'horrorshow' in their heads and so escape their social and psychological alienation for fifteen minutes or so. In the novel, when they are in an especially vindictive mood and want to prepare for 'twenty-to-one' (that is, in rhyming slang, violent fun), Alex and his droogs elect to drink 'milk plus' that contains what he refers to as 'knives': 'Or you could peet [drink] milk with knives in it, as we used to say, and this would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of dirty twenty-to-one.'¹⁵

Milk plus ... The name of this liquid, which is uncomfortably close to the conjunction 'milk pus', places corruption and innocence in a violent juxtaposition (cows infected with mastitis are, in fact, at risk of releasing pus into their milk, so this play on words is not entirely inappropriate). But, if the milk in Burgess's and Kubrick's dystopian society has been adulterated, if something foreign has been added to it, the phrase 'milk plus' also points to the idea, or the suspicion, that milk is never merely milk; that milk is never entirely identical with itself. As Melanie Jackson and Esther Leslie have put it, 'milk is subtle, supple, shifting, ever ready to become something other than itself.'¹⁶ For Hitchcock, certainly, even more than for Kubrick, milk is always milk plus. It contains an inherent surplus; a supplementary something that, like all supplements, at the same time constitutes an excess and implicitly exposes the fact that the original entity is intrinsically incomplete.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, even milk that contains no additives has lost its purity. When Alex returns to his 'manky quarters' in a block of flats, in the novel, he finds that his mother, before going to sleep, has left his

supper, consisting of 'tinned spongemeat' and 'a glass of the old cold moloko', on the kitchen table. This milk, of course, since it is mother's milk, has 'no knives or synthemesc or dremcom in it'. But its innocence has nonetheless been terminally tainted: 'How wicked, my brothers, innocent milk must always seem to me now.'¹⁷

In the early 1940s, when Kubrick was a high-school student and Hitchcock was making his first American movies, the average American was drinking more than a pint of milk a day. In *Suspicion*, Hitchcock renders this staple of domestic life, rich in nutritional and nurturing associations, strange, dangerous and deadly once again, as it had been a century before. He ensures through his ingenious technical innovation that, in the scene on the stairs, the luminosity of the milk, its inordinate milkiness, paradoxically evokes the hidden presence of its opposite: poison. Beneath this innocent, aqueous white substance – which might transmit a faint allusion to the fact that, in an earlier script for the film, as in the novel from which it was adapted, Lina was pregnant by this point in the narrative – there is an evil, viscous black substance.¹⁸ In this respect, like a photographic negative, or like one of Man Ray's characteristic images, the glass of milk reverses the monochromatic coding of Johnnie on the stairs. For, where he is a black figure distinguished by what looks at first glance like a radioactive white core, the glass of milk is, on the contrary, a white form that, so Hitchcock hints, contains some sort of invisible black lava.

When Lady Macbeth, in Shakespeare's tragedy, invokes the 'spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts', demanding that they 'unsex' her, she asks them, among other things, to 'take [her] milk for gall' (1. 5. 30–1, 38). She asks them, that is, to take her milk for black bile, the clotted liquid that, in the medical theory of the four humours, is the cause of melancholia (*melaina kole*; literally, 'black bile'). In *Suspicion*, the viewer, like Lina, takes Johnnie's milk for gall – in the sense that they interpret this thin-white, innocent liquid as a substance that secretly contains a thick-black, corrupt one. Excessively illuminated, the milk assumes the symbolic function, and the occult identity, of black bile. This is not the milk of human kindness but of human cruelty. Julia Kristeva, in her discussion of Aristotle and melancholy, observes that froth (*aphros*), a 'white mixture of air (*pneuma*) and liquid', is the 'euphoric counterpoint to black bile'. This mixture of air and liquid, she adds, 'brings out froth in the sea, wine, as well as in the sperm of man'.¹⁹ It also brings it out in milk, though she doesn't mention this substance. It might be said, then, conversely, that black bile is the dysphoric counterpart to milk. If milk is physically turbid, meaning cloudy or thick with suspended matter, because of the fat content of its casein proteins,

then it is also defined by a sort of spiritual or even ontological disturbance – the two words have a common root in the Latin *turbidus*.

Perhaps it is only after Freud that the impossible whiteness of milk, its fundamental nonidentity with itself, becomes perceptible. No doubt it is not an accident that Hitchcock returns to the image of a glass of milk, one that this time contains a sedative rather than a poison, in his most ‘psychoanalytic’ film, *Spellbound* (1945), which is probably most famous for the dream sequence that Salvador Dali designed for it. In one of the film’s lengthiest and most artfully choreographed shots, the fatherly psychoanalyst Dr. Alex Brulov (Michael Chekhov) gives a glass of milk that he has laced with bromide to John Ballantyne (Gregory Peck) – who, because of a traumatic memory that is only subsequently revealed, has an irrational fear of white objects and surfaces. Brulov gives Ballantyne this concoction of milk and dope – another recipe for ‘milk plus’ – because he fears that, in the grip of what the opening title calls the ‘devils of unreason’, the younger man might harm the older man and his former pupil, Dr. Constance Peterson (Ingrid Bergman).

Once Brulov has placed the glass of milk in Ballantyne’s left hand, Hitchcock frames the shot so that, very slightly out of focus, it floats in disconcerting proximity to the cut-throat razor that, sharply defined and catching the light, he holds in his right hand (Figure 3) (In what is surely the director’s sly tribute to his celebrity set designer, this blade recalls the notorious opening shot of Dali and Buñuel’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1929).) It is as if the blade, in the foreground, on the left, relates to the milk, in the background, on the right, not only as its symbolic opposite, as in some Surrealist variant of the game ‘Rock, Paper, Scissors’, but as a sign of its inner logic. It exposes the latent danger in the milk – as though, in spite of its soft, warm innocence, this liquid contains something hard and cold that is potentially lethal. The blade therefore functions, in a sense, as the milk’s unconscious. In the language of Alex from *A Clockwork Orange*, this is ‘milk plus’ containing ‘knives’.

The ‘story of right hand, left hand’ that, in Charles Laughton’s *Night of the Hunter* (1955), is narrated by the preacher impersonated by Robert Mitchum, to such sinister effect, is in this scene from *Spellbound* dramatized not in terms of Love and Hate but the razor blade and the glass of milk. These items initially seem to stand in, respectively, for a violent masculine or paternal principle and a nurturing female or maternal one. But this neat opposition is complicated by the fact that the milk, which Ballantyne proceeds to drink, thereby preempting his use of the blade as Brulov had intended, contains the bromide. The ‘victory’ of the milk over the blade, of the maternal impulse over the paternal one, in sedating him and rapidly sending him to sleep, thus entails

Ballantyne's emasculation. In this sense, too, the milk secretly contains the castrating knife; indeed, it is in a sense more deadly than the knife because of its apparent innocence.

As in *Suspicion*, though perhaps even more surprisingly, the viewer is also implicated in this process of poisoning by milk. For, in a startling reverse cut, Hitchcock constructs a point-of-view shot that identifies them with Ballantyne as he drains the milk (Figure 4). In an article published in 1946, the director explained that 'the camera moves to a back shot, so that the audience is behind his eyes as he drinks. You get the impression of the white liquid obscuring his sight as he tilts the glass.'²⁰

Brulov is visible through the bottom of the glass as the liquid subsides. But the paradoxical effect of Ballantyne's tipping the glass back before his eyes is to make the milk rise like a tide in front of the camera even as the liquid drains away. At the climax of this remarkable, frankly shocking shot, the milk seems to fill the screen, which finally, albeit briefly, becomes no more than a blank white square (Figure 5). In completing their identification with Ballantyne, who presumably loses consciousness at this moment of abstraction, it is as if the viewer too has been sedated. The viewer's sensation, during the dissolve, is of themselves dissolving in milk; of helplessly capitulating, as in a dream, to its associations with the comforting and the cosy, though at the same time with a fatal premonition of its potential deadliness. Whiteness, here, signifies unconsciousness; and, by extension, death. Perhaps it also signifies the blank screen of the cinema itself.

'Our story,' the opening title of *Spellbound* announces in sententious tones, 'deals with psychoanalysis, the method by which modern science treats the emotional problems of the sane.' Psychoanalytic practice, which uncovers the dark drives that covertly motivate the most innocuous gestures, might itself be represented, if in a slightly colourful metaphor, in terms of the attempt both to distil and extract the black bile or poison secreted in milk. Freud, after all, exposes the fact that the most innocent of all relationships, supposedly, the relationship between mother and child, one that is sometimes symbolized by the milk the child imbibes from its mother's nourishing breast, is from the beginning shaped by forbidden desires. In the 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), discussing autoerotism, Freud traces the role of sucking in adult sexuality back to 'the child's lips', which 'behaved like an *erogenous zone*; presumably the stimulation by the warm flow of milk was the cause of the pleasurable sensation'.²¹ Milk is thus almost from the moment of the subject's birth caught up in an autoerotic economy.

Freud confirms this insight in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1917) when he defines symptoms as unconscious attempts, duly overdetermined and distorted, to repeat an ‘infantile kind of satisfaction’. The paradox is that, as a result of ‘psychical conflict’, the subject experiences this satisfaction as suffering:

What was once a satisfaction to the subject is, indeed, bound to arouse his resistance or his disgust to-day. We are familiar with a trivial but instructive model of this change of mind. The same child who once eagerly sucked the milk from his mother’s breast is likely a few years later to display a strong dislike to drinking milk, which his upbringing has difficulties in overcoming. This dislike increases to disgust if a skin forms on the milk or the drink containing it. We cannot exclude the possibility, perhaps, that the skin conjures up a memory of the mother’s breast, once so ardently desired. Between the two situations, however, there lies the experience of weaning, with its traumatic effects.²²

In this paradigm, to put it simply, milk becomes poisonous. What was once a source of innocent satisfaction is transformed into an object of disgust.

If Kristeva doesn’t mention the substance in her book on melancholia, she nonetheless refers to milk, or the skin on milk, in a rather violent, rhetorically charged passage from the opening pages of her book on abjection. There, she too points to the dialectic of milk that I have been explicating. Identifying ‘food loathing’ as ‘perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection’, she is prompted to give the following, psychically charged example:

When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. ‘I’ want none of that element, sign of their desire, ‘I’ do not want to listen, ‘I’ do not assimilate it, ‘I’ expel it. But since the food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me’, who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which I claim to establish *myself*.²³

The sight of the surface of the milk, which has inspissated to form a thin membrane that has something of the repulsive quality of ectoplasm, and that is thus the very opposite of the 'froth' that she conjures up in her account of melancholia, pitches her body into a state of convulsion. And this convulsion dramatizes her body's refusal of itself, its recoil from itself, in so far as her body is itself the product of her parent's sexual desire. The skin on the milk precipitates a traumatic, symptomatic repetition of the primal scene and thus reenacts a kind of fall from innocence. A moment of corruption. The convulsive body Kristeva so vividly describes in her account of abjection produces or secretes some of those waste products that, though ostensibly the opposite of milk because they are toxic, actually share an identity with it – sweat, tears and ... bile. There is a secret sympathy between these excretory substances on the one hand and milk on the other. Milk, it might be concluded, is itself a kind of skin, one that conceals something sinister and venomous.

In *Suspicion*, it transpires that Johnnie is not after all attempting to murder Lina. There is no poison in the glass of milk.²⁴ At least, that is the viewer's assumption – one that is never tested because she never tastes it. But that does not eliminate the viewer's intuitive conviction that the milk he carried to her bedroom contained a dangerous foreign substance: that it concealed an alien kernel. Milk plus. This revelation, instead, reinforces the suspicion that, in some innate sense, milk is too good to be true. It cannot, surely, be as innocent as it seems, just as Johnnie cannot, surely, be as innocent as he seems. A kind of remainder or residue is left, a sense that the milk was after all corrupt, and that he himself is after all fundamentally untrustworthy. At the very least, it might be noted, there is something infantilizing about him bringing Lina the glass of milk in bed. It neutralizes her sexuality and, with a superficial kindness that is covertly cruel or even sadistic, coerces her back into a presexual state, a condition of physical and psychological dependence.

So, once Hitchcock has ostensibly eliminated the suspicion that the glass of milk had originally aroused, a suspicion nonetheless remains. Characteristically, Hitchcock has schooled the viewer to adopt a sceptical attitude – this is the Hitchcockian hermeneutic of suspicion – and they consequently continue to question what they see and hear. There is a surplus of suspicion. This is no accident. In his conversations with Truffaut, the director indicated that, if it hadn't been for the influence of the RKO producers, he'd have preferred to make Johnnie a murderer after all. He professed that he had not been 'too pleased with the way *Suspicion* ends':

I had something else in mind. The scene I wanted, but it was never shot, was for Cary Grant to bring her a glass of milk that's been poisoned and Joan Fontaine has just finished a letter to her mother: 'Dear Mother, I'm desperately in love with him, but I don't want to live because he's a killer. Though I'd rather die, I think society should be protected from him.' Then Cary Grant comes in with the fatal glass and she says, 'Will you mail this letter to Mother for me, dear?' She drinks the milk and dies. Fade out and fade in on one short shot: Cary Grant, whistling cheerfully, walks over to the mailbox and pops the letter in.²⁵

This ending is far closer to the one in *Before the Fact* (1932), the novel by Anthony Berkeley Cox on which the film is based, where Lina drinks the poison because she knows that, as well as embezzling and philandering, Johnnie has murdered her father.²⁶ As Michael Walker has argued, however, there is an intriguing sense in which Hitchcock 'contrived to smuggle his original wishes into the film as it stands, so that Johnnie really is a murderer and the milk really is poisoned'.²⁷ The fact that Lina doesn't drink from the glass, in the script that was eventually shot, seems to confirm this reading; at least, significantly, it doesn't disconfirm it. In Hitchcock's films, glasses of milk that haven't been poisoned have been poisoned.

Like spilt milk, then, with the distinctive sour odor it quickly acquires, doubt stains the innocence of the ending of *Suspicion*. 'Pointedly,' as William Rothman notes, '*Suspicion* ultimately leaves unanswered whether Johnnie is a murderer or, rather, like the Cary Grant characters in *Notorious* and *North by Northwest* [1959], overcomes his own dark impulses and becomes a man willing and able to commit himself to the kind of marriage that remarriage comedies envision.'²⁸ Perhaps there is a trace here, too, of the milk in Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), another film, released the year before *Suspicion*, with a notably ambiguous ending. In *Foreign Correspondent*, Stebbins (Robert Benchley), who reluctantly sips milk because his doctor has forbidden him to drink scotch and soda, the liquor his companion Johnny Jones (Joel McCrea) is enjoying, pulls a face and declares, 'Doesn't taste the way it did when I was a baby – that's got poison in it.' What Stebbins misses is that all milk, whether cow's milk or mother's milk, has poison in it – maybe the ambiguity of the 'that's' in this line, which might almost refer to the milk he had as an infant, is significant here.

Hitchcock's final attempt to point to this is *Psycho* (1960), where Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) offers Marion (Janet Leigh) a glass of milk with her sandwich after she has arrived at his motel – shortly before

he murders her in the distinctive shape of Mrs. Bates. This milk – Mother’s milk, so to speak – does not of course consist of poison; but, again, its apparent goodness is not simply a counterpoint to Norman’s evil, it implicitly contains it in the form of an undetectable alien element. There is a sense in which, symbolically speaking, it does conceal poison in this scene. Certainly, in so far as offering milk to Marion is a ‘maternal’ gesture, it is one that points to the corrupt as opposed to innocent nature of the maternal per se in this film. In Freudian terms, it might be claimed that Norman is incompletely weaned from his mother’s breast, so that milk for him is implicitly a complicated admixture of disgust and desire.

In *Suspicion* the milk contains an unseen core of blackness. But it might be added that, even more disturbingly, the milk in *Suspicion* is positively constituted by this concealed, invisible blackness. This blackness is the plus in Hitchcock’s milk plus. Hitchcock, deploying his tested techniques of suspense in order to play on the suspicions of his viewer, reveals in this scene the essence of milk. The poison, putative though it is, is thus essential to the milk in a double sense: on the one hand, it is an essence in the sense of a concentrate or distillate; and, on the other, it is an essence in the sense that, though hidden, or even because it is hidden, it is its intrinsic property or defining principle. Milk is, in short, black – as in the shocking opening phrase of Paul Celan’s poem ‘Todesfugue’ (1948), which becomes no less shocking when it is repeated at the start of every stanza: *Schwarze Milch*.²⁹ Black Milk. An evil whiteness; one that Celan associates with Nazism and its cancerous conception of civilization. A whiteness that is at the same time blackness ...

It was the French novelist, playwright and poet Jacques Audiberti, as I intimated at the start of this article, who contrived the phrase ‘the secret blackness of milk’: *la secrète noirceur du lait*. It appears – with something of the mysterious potency of a formula for some alchemical potion – in a sonnet entitled ‘Du côté de Lariboisière’ from his collection of poems *Race des hommes* (1937):

Je dévalerai vers le bout
 que ne veille plus le hibou
 des tétons où tu te profères
 Ô femme dont me désolait
 la secrète noirceur du lait,

ô phoque des deux hémisphères!³⁰

In the fourth of these lines, the *lait* is encapsulated like a kind of code in the word *désolait*. In the fifth, it spills from this container and takes on a concrete, independent state of existence (it becomes a sort of *sinthom*). There, its secret blackness oozes like bile. Then, in the sixth of these lines, it solidifies in the form of the rubbery black ‘seal’ (*phoque*). The abstract and the concrete, white and black, liquid and solid – these opposites are confounded or confused. The poet thus intermixes milk and melancholy. In *Faux Pas* (1943), Maurice Blanchot characterized Audiberti as ‘poet in fortunate equilibrium between day and night, between the word and its mysterious shadow’.³¹ In this poem’s representation of milk, though, the relationship between day and night, between light and dark, white and black, is more dialectical than Blanchot indicates, for the latter is internal to the former: the secret nightness of day. The ‘mysterious shadow’ of the word ‘milk’ is not so much cast behind it as embedded deep inside it. Audiberti’s image is too disturbing to be described in terms of an ‘equilibrium’.

The phrase *la secrète noirceur du lait*, and its variations, has an interesting intellectual afterlife. For, sometimes circulating at second hand, it seems to have acquired almost talismanic importance for several of the most significant French philosophers of the mid-twentieth century. It finds its way, like a mysterious rumour, into the work of a number of phenomenological thinkers in particular. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for example, cites it in his posthumously published manuscript *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964) during a discussion, mediated through Marcel Proust, of the way in which the invisible is a secret presence inside the visible. Here, he claims that ‘literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are’, for Proust, ‘the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas’, but then proceeds to misattribute Audiberti’s idea to Paul Valéry: ‘As the secret blackness of milk, of which Valéry spoke, is accessible only through its whiteness, the idea of light or the musical idea doubles up the lights and sounds from beneath, is their other side or depth.’³² Perhaps Valéry did however speak of the secret blackness of milk (in *Monsieur Teste* (1896), he portrays his eponymous hero, who prays to a divinity in the form of universal Blackness, as ‘[un] être noir mordoré par les lumières’ (‘a black being tinged gold by light’)).³³ After all, it was on the occasion when Audiberti received the Prix de poésie de l’Académie Mallarmé for *Race des hommes* in 1938 that he first met Valéry. In ‘The Pythoness’, from *Charms* (1922), Valéry had conjured up an image of gold on an epaulette sporting in ‘une fontaine de noirceur’ (‘a pool of blackness’).³⁴ This is a vision that,

as if applying the principles of a photographic negative, Audiberti might be said, in his vision of the blackness of milk, both to have inverted and to have rendered in black and white.

Prior to Merleau-Ponty's misappropriation of Audiberti's curious, disconcerting image, Sartre invoked 'the secret blackness of milk', like a kind of incantation, in at least four contexts – though, inadvertently or not, he seems to have rearranged the order of Audiberti's terms, substituting each time *la noirceur secrète du lait* for *la secrète noirceur du lait*. I mentioned the fourth of these incidences in my introduction. The first of these incidences, which demands closer analysis, was a review, published in *Comoedia* in June 1941, of Jean Giono's translation of *Moby Dick* (1851), Herman Melville's monumental account of Captain Ahab's obsessive pursuit of the white whale. There, meditating on the fact that in the narrative 'whiteness returns like a leitmotiv of demoniacal horror', Sartre observes that the North American novelist 'suffers from a very special kind of color blindness: he is condemned to strip things of their colored appearance, condemned to see white.' Melville in this way inhabits a world that, bled of all colour, is fundamentally blank. He sees through the flesh, painted and tinted though it might be, to the bleached bones beneath. Sartre then insists:

But it isn't nothingness he's looking at but pure being, the secret whiteness of being; he 'looks upon ... the universe's leprous skin, the gigantic white shroud that wraps all things, with a naked eye.' I am reminded of that contrary yet identical expression of Audiberti's, 'the secret blackness of milk.' Black and white are the same here, in a Hegelian identity of opposites. [...] At their center, on the level of their sheer existence, beings are indifferently black or white: black in their compact and stubborn isolation, white when they are struck by the light's great emptiness.³⁵

The 'secret whiteness of being', Sartre argues, is strictly equivalent to the 'secret blackness of milk'. It is its dialectical obverse. Beings and things, stripped of their appearance, are secretly defined by a terrifying monochromatic blankness. Beneath their surface colours, at 'the level of sheer existence', they are either, in the light, indifferently white, a kind of vast blank whiteness; or, in the night, indifferently black, a concentrated core of blackness. Milk, according to this logic, entails an encounter with pure being. It is an ontological substance, pre-symbolic, like the Lacanian Real.

The second, pivotal occasion on which Sartre repeated Audiberti's spell, which demands a more detailed reading still, was in the section

on 'Quality as a Revelation of Being' in the penultimate chapter of *Being and Nothingness* (1943). There, offering a qualified tribute to the influence of Bachelard, he attempts to construct 'a psychoanalysis of things'. Sartre's 'psychoanalysis of things', which prompts my psychoanalysis of milk in this article, is not a method that seeks to reveal what the subject projects, unconsciously, onto objects; it is one that, instead, uncovers the unconscious of the objects themselves (though Sartre, it must immediately be added, does not use the term 'unconscious' in this context). This sort of psychoanalysis, he explains, gently distancing himself from Bachelard and, implicitly, rather more roughly distancing himself from the Freudians, 'will not look for images but rather will seek to explain the meaning which really belongs to things'.³⁶ He is interested not in men and women, and their memories or fantasies, but in the things themselves, especially the secret or ontological meaning of things. As one recent commentator has explained, Sartre 'aims at capturing the modes of being that belong to things themselves as they are given in lived experience', so his approach 'is not about our subjective impressions, but about the *objective meanings* of material things'.³⁷ This is an ontological psychoanalysis; or, more precisely, a psychoanalytic ontology. 'We should establish the goal of psychoanalysis strictly from the standpoint of ontology,' Sartre writes, since 'what ontology can teach psychoanalysis is first of all the true origin of the meaning of things and their true relation to human reality'.³⁸

It is in the course of his opening comments on the 'psychoanalysis of things' in this section of *Being and Nothingness*, which subsequently includes his brilliant though ultimately misogynistic account of the ontological meanings of sliminess, that Sartre cites Audiberti's allusion to the secret blackness of milk. In the first couple of paragraphs, he proposes taking the attempt 'to determine the objective meaning of snow' as a preliminary example of this psychoanalytic ontology – the fundamental aim of which, as he explains, is to ascertain both the 'material meanings' of things and the 'human sense' of them.³⁹ His first move, in this respect, is to reflect on the 'melting' quality of snow, comparing this substance to 'other objects located in other regions of existence but equally objective, equally transcendental – ideas, friendship, persons – concerning which I can also say that they melt'. He then offers 'certain other more mysterious examples of melting', specifically the Grimms' fairy tale about a tailor who, in order to persuade a giant that he possesses superhuman strength, pretends that the piece of soft cheese he has in his pocket is a stone and squeezes it in a single hand so that it looks as if he is strong

enough to liquidize it. 'Such a comparison,' Sartre writes, 'informs us of a secret liquid quality in solids, in the sense in which Audiberti by a happy inspiration spoke of the secret blackness of milk.' This image of a secret liquidity, like Audiberti's image of a secret blackness, points to what Sartre, who is also thinking of the juice in fruit and the blood in human beings, calls 'a certain permanent possibility' of the object's self-transformation. It is of instrumental importance, according to him, in 'deciphering the secret meaning of the snow, which is an ontological meaning'.⁴⁰

Using some of Sartre's formulations from later in the section on 'Quality as a Revelation of Being', it might be said that blackness is the 'metaphysical purport' or 'metaphysical coefficient' of milk. For, in the paragraph before he commences his sustained reflections on the quality of the 'slimy', he refers to 'the metaphysical purport of all intuitive revelation of being'; and, for hypothetical purposes, first asks, 'what is the metaphysical purport of yellow, of red, of polished, of wrinkled?', and, second, 'what is the metaphysical coefficient of lemon, water, of oil, etc.?'⁴¹ The same question might be asked of the colour white; and, more importantly, of milk. If the metaphysical purport or coefficient of water is sliminess, as Sartre at one point implies, then what is the metaphysical purport or coefficient of milk? Bile, perhaps. Or, in Kubrick's terms, chemical stimulants; even 'knives'. And, in Hitchcock's terms, which are most pressing here, and which come closest to some universal value, poison.

It is in poison that the secret blackness of milk, as a mode of being, symbolizes itself. Sartre proposes that the secret of water, in all its fluidity and transparency, is a slimy substance such as 'pitch'; something that has 'a sticky thickness in its liquidity', something that 'represents in itself a dawning triumph of the solid over the liquid'. 'Slime,' Sartre states in one magnificent sentence, 'is the agony of water.' In this form, he adds, 'it presents itself as a phenomenon in process of becoming'.⁴² Poison is the agony of milk. In order to maintain its reputation for purity, so to speak, milk must constantly repress its inner condition of otherness, which constantly threatens to transform it into its symbolic opposite, namely a substance that is corrupt rather than innocent, black rather than white. It is this ineluctable 'process of becoming', the agonistic struggle of the thing with itself, that Hitchcock's lightbulb dramatizes in *Suspicion*. The invisible poison perceived by the viewer in the glass of milk that Johnnie takes to Lina, to put it in Sartre's language, represents in itself a 'dawning triumph' of blackness over whiteness, evil over goodness. As Jacques Derrida once summarized it, deliberately

echoing Bachelard, ‘the heart of light is black.’⁴³ The heart of milk is poison.

What about Bachelard? He recalls Audiberti’s reference to the ‘secret blackness of milk’, citing *Being and Nothingness* in a discreet footnote as he does so, in *Earth and Reveries of Repose: An Essay on Images of Interiority* (1948). The formulation had such an impact on Bachelard that, before he had read anything else by Audiberti, he sent him an impassioned and, not least because of the maternal associations of milk, rather moving letter: ‘Avec vous, à 71 ans, j’ai l’impression de réapprendre ma langue maternelle.’⁴⁴

In the first chapter of *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, which is the companion volume to *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (1947), Bachelard explores certain dialectics that he sees as characteristic of ‘reveries of interiority’. In the fourth section of this chapter, he turns from the ‘geometrical contradiction of the small that, deep within, is big’, to another kind of contradiction, one evident in those reveries in which ‘it seems that the interior is automatically the reverse of the exterior’. ‘Look!’ he cries with a poetic or rhetorical flourish, ‘How white the pulp is in this dark chestnut!’ Among the examples of this phenomenon that he adduces is ‘the “accepted truth” of the Middle Ages that the snow-white swan is entirely black inside’. In fact, he concedes, the insides of a swan are of course no different from those of any other bird; but ‘primary psychological forces’ are stronger than ‘real experiences’. ‘If the intense blackness of the swan is so repeatedly affirmed, despite the facts, this is because it fulfils a law of dialectical imagination.’⁴⁵

What Bachelard proposes, here, is an interpretive method that ‘dream[s] of matter that is never seen’.⁴⁶ He calls this a ‘negativist’ mode of reading. In order to demonstrate this method, Bachelard quotes a line from Tristan Tzara’s epic poem *The Approximate Man* (1931) in which this Romanian-French Surrealist, conjuring an image of ‘the swan that gargles its water-white’, insists that ‘outside is white.’ Bachelard’s point is that, ‘if we read this little phrase purely positively and learn that swans are white, then we have a dreamless reading;’ but if we read it negatively we have what might be termed, though he himself doesn’t use the word, a dreamful reading, or a ‘reverie of material interiority’. ‘A negativist reading, a reading with sufficient liberty to let us revel in the liberties the poet takes, will on the contrary restore us to depth,’ he argues. And he adds, in a wonderful formulation, ‘if “outside is white,” it is because this being has been put on the outside – has driven out – all the whiteness it had.’ ‘Negativity’, or a ‘negativist’ reading, Bachelard concludes, ‘evokes the dark.’⁴⁷

A ‘negativist’ understanding of milk, it can therefore be assumed, is one that apprehends the luminescent surface appearance of this liquid as the consequence of its having driven out ‘all the whiteness it had’ from its interior to its exterior. It is one that recognizes that there is an invisible but not imperceptible darkness or blackness on the inside of milk. Or at least that the ‘material imagination’ seeks this occluded inside. As he explains, Bachelard goes on to ‘examine in some detail an image from Audiberti, an image whose life stems from the contradiction between a substance and its attribute’:

In a sonnet of his, Audiberti speaks of ‘the secret blackness of milk.’ This pleasing sonority is, oddly enough, not just a verbal joy. For anyone who loves to imagine matter, it is a deep joy. Indeed, we only have to dream a little of this thick, pasty whiteness, of this solid, nourishing whiteness, and we shall feel that the material imagination needs there to be something dark and pasty beneath whiteness. Without it, milk would not have this matte whiteness, this really thick, deep whiteness that is sure of its depth. And without it, this nourishing liquid would not have all these *terrestrial* values. It is this desire to see the other side of whiteness beneath whiteness that leads the imagination to darken certain blue reflections passing over the liquid, and to find its way towards ‘the secret blackness of milk.’⁴⁸

Bachelard’s ‘material imagination’ searches for ‘the other side of whiteness beneath whiteness’. And it finds it in Audiberti’s image of the secret blackness of milk. It finds it, too, in comparable images from other literary texts: in Pierre Guéguen’s *Bretagne: Au bout du monde* (1930), which in a delightful passage that seeks to capture the foaming of the sea claims that ‘curdled milk would taste of ink’; in Élémir Bourges’s *La Nef* (1904), which refers to the Gorgons’ ‘black milk’; and in Rainer Maria Rilke’s diaries, which describe an incident during his travels in Worpswede in 1900 when he was given a magical or miraculous milk that, because it has been taken from a goat milked in the night, is jet-black.⁴⁹ These are all instances, as Bachelard sees it, of the ‘material imagination’, in its most acute forms, ‘need[ing] there to be something dark and pasty beneath whiteness’; and finding it there.

The ‘material imagination’ so carefully fostered and so brilliantly promoted by Bachelard finds in things what it needs to find in them. It is for this reason that, in *Being and Nothingness*, five years before the publication of *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, Sartre both praised Bachelard for making ‘a real discovery in his “material imagination”’, saluting *Water*

and *Dreams* (1942) in particular for its ‘great promise’; and, at the same time, distanced himself from this discovery because to him it seemed to entail the subject projecting images onto the object. ‘In truth,’ Sartre writes, ‘this term *imagination* does not suit us and neither does that attempt to look behind things and their gelatinous, solid, or fluid matter, for the “images” which we project there.’ The psychoanalysis of things that he himself attempts to develop, in contradistinction to Bachelard, is one that, as I have already underlined, ‘will not look for images but rather will seek to explain the meaning which really belongs to things.’ That is, it is a psychoanalysis that excavates the ontological meanings of things. For Sartre, Bachelard’s relies too much, in methodological terms, upon the ‘Freudian libido’ as a postulate for his enquiries into objects, but it is also too attached to literature: the former’s psychoanalysis depends ‘on the things themselves, not upon men’; and ‘that is also why I should have less confidence than M. Bachelard in resorting at this level to the material imaginations of poets, whether Lautréamont, Rimbaud, or Poe.’ ‘A psychoanalysis of things and of their matter,’ Sartre reiterates, ‘ought above all to be concerned with establishing the way in which each thing is the *objective* symbol of being and of the relation of human reality to this being.’⁵⁰

If there are important differences between Sartre’s thinking in *Being and Nothingness* and Bachelard’s in *Water and Dreams*, then by the time of *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, the latter appears to have moved closer to the former (perhaps because of the former’s criticisms of the latter). In this book, Bachelard is implicitly critical of a psychoanalysis of things that simply ‘look[s] behind things’, in Sartre’s language, ‘for the “images” which we project there’. At one point, for example, he notes that the French philosopher of language Brice Parain, in his *Recherches sur la nature et les fonctions du langage* (1942), himself mentions Audiberti’s image of milk:

The secret blackness of milk has caught Brice Parain’s attention. He sees it, however, as a mere flight of fantasy. ‘I am quite at liberty,’ he writes, ‘to speak, against all likelihood, of the “secret blackness of milk” and to lie in full knowledge that I am lying; language lends itself, it seems to me, to my every whim, since it is I who take it where I wish to.’⁵¹

Bachelard disapproves of this dismissive attitude (which approximates, in effect, to Humpty Dumpty’s standpoint in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871): “When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither

more nor less”). He thinks it ‘does poetic imagination an injustice’ because it implies ‘that the poet is no more than an illusionist who wants to make sensations lie, who accumulates whims and contradictions at the very heart of the image’. Bachelard’s point is that ‘what is hinted at’ in the idea of milk’s secret blackness ‘is by no means always a lie’.⁵²

Bachelard thus implicitly starts to align himself more closely with Sartre’s interpretive strategy. Indeed, Bachelard then proceeds explicitly to quote an article by Sartre, published some three years earlier, about the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelist Jules Renard’s journals:

When the poet tells us milk’s *secret*, he is not lying to himself nor is he lying to others. On the contrary, he finds an extraordinary totality there. As Jean-Paul Sartre says, ‘we have to invent the heart of things if we wish to discover it some day. Audiberti is informing us about milk when he speaks of its ‘secret blackness.’ For Renard though, milk is irredemiably [sic] white ‘since it is but what it appears to be.’⁵³

Sartre’s article, ‘Man Bound Hand and Foot: Notes on Jules Renard’s *Journal*’ (1945), is the third of those four occasions, chronologically speaking, on which he restlessly probes Audiberti’s representation of milk. There, Sartre expresses his admiration for the way in which, in contrast to the previous generation of novelists, including Dickens, Flaubert and Zola, Renard is less concerned with constructing ‘an enormous inventory of the real’ than with penetrating the essence of things in their singularity: ‘Renard, when faced with the individual object, feels the need to grasp it deeply, to get inside the stuff of it.’ But if Sartre is sympathetic to his ‘efforts to make things bleed’ – to discern, for instance, what Renard calls ‘the quivering of water beneath the ice’ – he nonetheless dismisses them as ‘clumsy’. Renard’s attempts to apprehend the interior life of things, which he concedes is ‘at the origin of many more modern endeavours’, is too ‘hampered by his very realism’. For Renard to achieve what he seems to desire, Sartre suggests, for him ‘to arrive at this visionary communion with things’, ‘the object would have to have a heart of darkness; it would have to be something other than a pure sensory experience, a collection of sensations.’ It is at this moment, citing Audiberti, that Sartre insists ‘you have to invent the heart of things if you want to discover it one day’.⁵⁴ The idea of milk’s secret blackness is a paradigmatic example of a mode of perception that, in spite of its visionary impetus, or because of it, reveals a thing’s very

being. Audiberti, in a single stroke, makes milk bleed; and it bleeds ... blackness.

Bachelard, too, in *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, is committed to the idea not only that 'you have to invent the heart of things' in order to grasp their being but that 'the object would have to have a heart of darkness' in the first place. It is a question not simply of inventing the sliminess of water, to revisit Sartre's example from *Being and Nothingness*, but of perceiving the prior presence of this sliminess. There is something alien at the core of all things. Each thing, in its being, is nonidentical with itself. And this alien kernel – it is tempting to echo Lacan once more and represent it in terms of the Real – constitutes the thing's concealed truth. Once Bachelard has endorsed Sartre's comments on Renard, in the sentences from *Earth and Reveries of Repose* I have quoted, he uses the distinction between milk that is irredeemably white and milk that is secretly black, in effect, to discriminate between the hermeneutics of reason and those of the imagination: 'It is here that we can grasp the difference between all the dialectics of reason, of the reason that juxtaposes contradictions in order to cover the whole field of the possible, and those of the imagination that wants to take hold of all the real and finds more reality in what is hidden than in what is shown.'⁵⁵

Bachelard and Sartre both seek this real-that-is-more-real-than-reality. They are on the side of Audiberti against Renard. The Real against the real. Both are engaged in what Bachelard calls a 'negativist reading' of things. This is the aim of the so-called psychoanalysis of things that, despite their different approaches, both philosophers exemplify in the form of Audiberti's image of the secret blackness of milk. Both philosophers, it seems, identify the blackness in this substance, emblematic as it is of whiteness, not simply as an absent presence, but as a present absence. The blackness in milk, in other words, is not merely abstract. It is not merely present in some notional sense; that is, present because, as the opposite of whiteness, according to a binary logic, it necessarily or constitutively defines this property. Instead, it is concrete. Milk is secretly black not because it is not-not-black but because it is too white. Its excessive whiteness – visible perhaps in those 'blue reflections' that Bachelard, looking no doubt at milk with a reduced fat content, observes 'passing over the liquid' – points to a core of blackness. A heart of darkness. 'For after all,' as Sartre mischievously comments in his catalogue essay on Hare, which I quoted in my introductory section, 'it's true that the secret blackness of milk *exists*.' Blackness is what, in his discussion of snow, he had referred to as 'a certain permanent possibility' in milk.

Hitchcock too seeks this real-that-is-more-real-than-reality; and he too finds it in milk. This is the lesson of the lightbulb he inserts in the glass of milk that Johnnie takes to Lina in *Suspicion* (Figure 6). It reveals the presence of poison, a secret blackness. Even though there is none. Or, perhaps, especially because there is none. Except, of course, that the glass does effectively contain poison – because, according to his own claims, this was Hitchcock’s original intention for the scene. The lightbulb is a brilliant technical innovation not only because, with scintillating economy, it transmits the excessive whiteness of milk and therefore reveals its secret blackness. It also provides a means of circumventing the strictures of the studio, for in a way that a glass spotlight from the outside could never have done it indelibly associates the milk with poison.

Hitchcock’s staging of the glass of milk in this scene is, finally, a kind of allegory of the interpretive processes celebrated by Sartre and Bachelard in relation to Audiberti’s image: it instigates a ‘negativist reading’ of this object. It induces the viewer, almost spontaneously, to enact a psychoanalysis of the milk as a thing, one that deduces the very core of its being. It stages, in Sartre’s terms, the ‘dawning triumph’ of the secret blackness in whiteness; the secret poison in milk.

Notes

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- 1 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 6. See also Roland Barthes, ‘Wine and Milk,’ in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2000), 60: ‘[milk’s] purity, associated with the innocence of the child, is a token of strength, of a strength which is not revulsive, not congestive, but calm, white, lucid, the equal of reality.’ It could be said that in my consideration of milk the substance is on the contrary associated with corruption, a token of a strength that is revulsive and congestive, that is turbid, turbulent and... black.
- 2 Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘N-Dimensional Sculpture,’ in *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Volume 2: Selected Prose*, ed. Michel Contat and Michael Rybalka (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 170.
- 3 Note that, in this article, I do not address the racialized dimension of the idea of ‘blackness’ discerned by Audiberti and others in relation to milk.
- 4 Richard Allen notes that ‘*Suspicion* draws brilliantly upon Cary Grant’s own star persona: the transformation of Archie Leach the cockney lad into “Cary Grant” the romantic hero who always seems to contain Leach under his skin’ – see ‘Hitchcock, or the Pleasures of Metaskepticism,’ *October* 89 (1999), 76.
- 5 According to William Rothman, Hitchcock ‘designs *Suspicion* to pose the question, which it likewise leaves unanswerable, whether the film itself

- is a Hitchcock thriller or a comedy of remarriage' – see *Must We Kill the Thing We Love?: Emersonian Perfectionism and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 72.
- 6 Quoted in Rick Worland, 'Before and After the Fact: Writing and Reading Hitchcock's *Suspicion*,' *Cinema Journal* 1: 4 (2002), 20.
 - 7 Slavoj Žižek, 'Hitchcockian *Sinthoms*,' in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock* (London: Verso, 1992), 125-6. See also Slavoj Žižek, 'From Symptom to *Sinthome*,' in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 55-84.
 - 8 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 1992), 203.
 - 9 François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, with Helen G. Scott, revised edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 1 43.
 - 10 Kenneth Hayes, *Milk and Melancholy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Prefix Press, 2008), 29.
 - 11 Casey McKittrick, *Hitchcock's Appetites: The Corpulent Plots of Desire and Dread* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 82.
 - 12 Mark Kurlansky, *Milk: A 10,000-Year Food Fracas* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 163-4.
 - 13 E. Melanie Dupuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 5-6. See Peter J. Atkins, 'White Poison? The Social Consequences of Milk Consumption, 1850-1930,' *Social History of Medicine* 5: 2 (1992), 207-27.
 - 14 Stanley Kubrick, *A Clockwork Orange: Screenplay* – available at: <https://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/A+Clockwork+Orange.pdf>
 - 15 Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), 3.
 - 16 Melanie Jackson and Esther Leslie, *Deeper in the Pyramid* (London: Banner Repeater, 2018), 3.
 - 17 Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, 25-6.
 - 18 On the censorship of this and other details by the Production Code Administration (PCA), see Worland, 'Before and After the Fact,' 10. It is noticeable that there are no children at all in this film – as if the infantilization of Lina leaves no room for them.
 - 19 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 7.
 - 20 Alfred Hitchcock, 'The "Hitch" Touch,' in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock: Selected Writings and Interviews*, Vol. 2, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 80.
 - 21 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition*, trans. Ulrike Kistner (London: Verso, 2016), 42.
 - 22 Sigmund Freud, 'The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms,' in *The Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 412-13.
 - 23 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2-3. Kristeva identifies the prohibition against the cultural, or culinary, use of milk to be found in parts of the Bible (e.g., 'Thou shalt not see the a kid in his mother's milk' [Exodus 23:19]) as a metaphor for the 'prohibition of incest' (105).

- 24 In *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (1947), a crude but compelling melodrama that leans heavily on the example of Hitchcock's film, and that like its predecessor casts Nigel Bruce in the role of an alcoholic, English director Peter Godfrey has Geoffrey Carroll (Humphrey Bogart) bring a glass of milk to Sally Carroll (Barbara Stanwyck) that, like the one that killed his first wife, is in fact poisoned.
- 25 Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 142.
- 26 Mark Crispin Miller tartly observes that 'this account tells us less about Hitchcock's real intentions as director than it reveals of his inventiveness as a raconteur, since there is no such ending written into any of the screenplay's several drafts' – see 'Hitchcock's Suspicions and *Suspicion*,' *MLN* 98: 5 (1983), 1,158. For a detailed account of the rather tortuous circumstances of *Suspicion*'s production, especially in relation to the film's different endings, see Worland, 'Before and After the Fact,' *passim*; see also John Billheimer, *Hitchcock and the Censors* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 85-90.
- 27 Michael Walker, *Hitchcock's Motifs* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 29.
- 28 Rothman, *Must We Kill the Thing We Love?*, 74.
- 29 Paul Celan, 'Todesfugue/Death Fugue,' in *Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 62/63. See also, before Celan's famous use of the image, 'Ins Leben' (1939), a poem by Rose Ausländer, like him a native of the Romanian city of Czernowitz, where she refers to the 'black milk and heavy absinth' that derives from the 'motherly intimacy' of grief.
- 30 Jacques Audiberti, *Race des hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 104.
- 31 Maurice Blanchot, 'Poetry and the Novel,' in *Faux Pas*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 211.
- 32 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 150.
- 33 Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1929), 37.
- 34 Paul Valéry, 'La Pythie,' in *Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Volume 1: Poems*, trans. David Paul (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 168.
- 35 Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*,' in *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Volume 2*, 138. Oddly, the quotation from Melville here seems to be an English translation of the French translation that Sartre attacks in his review for its failure to comprehend the novel. Melville's original prose, from the final paragraph of the remarkable chapter entitled 'The Whiteness of the Whale,' reads: 'the palsied universe lies before us a leper; and like wilful travellers in Lapland, who refuse to wear coloured and colouring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him' – see Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, ed. Tony Tanner (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), 175. It needs to be noted that any more systematic discussion of the symbolic meanings of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' either in Melville's novel or Sartre's interpretation of it must address the racial politics that is at the very least implicit in this semiotics.

- 36 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1989), 600. See, for a preliminary comparison of their conceptions of the image, Ronald Grimsley, 'Two Philosophical Views of the Literary Imagination: Sartre and Bachelard,' *Comparative Literature Studies* 8: 1 (1971), 42-57.
- 37 Sara Heinämaa, 'Psychoanalysis of Things: Objective Meanings or Subjective Projections?', in *Beauvoir and Sartre: The Riddle of Influence*, ed. Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb (Bloomington, IN: Indiana State University Press, 2009), 128.
- 38 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 602, 603.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 600.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 600-1.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 604.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 607.
- 43 Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1990), 86.
- 44 Quoted in Constantin Toloudis, *Jacques Audiberti* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), 23.
- 45 Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose: An Essay on Images of Interiority*, trans. Mary McAllester Jones (Dallas, TX: Dallas Institute, 2011), 15.
- 46 Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 16.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 15-16.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 17-18.
- 50 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 600-3.
- 51 Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 18. See Brice Parain, *Recherches sur la nature et les fonctions du langage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 71, 97. Note incidentally that Parain, who had been Jean-Luc Godard's philosophy tutor, appears as himself in *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962).
- 52 Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 19.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 54 Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Man Bound Hound and Foot: Notes on Jules Renard's *Journal*,' in *Critical Essays (Situations I)*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Seagull, 2010), 482-4.
- 55 Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 19.